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ABSTRACT

A method for keeping records of British student language learning progress is described and illustrated. Introductory sections highlight the following: (1) the influence of recent trends in syllabus design on recording; (2) the influence of recent trends in assessment on recording; (3) the role of the consumer in the recording of programs in modern languages; and (4) implications of the current climate for recording pupils' progress. Subsequent sections address four specific issues: integration of planning and recordkeeping; the recording of communicative competence; reporting pupils' progress to others; and areas with potential for teacher innovation. These discussions are illustrated with forms and charts used in the recordkeeping method in question. They include a form for assessment by both the teacher and the student himself, skill level descriptions, pages from a teacher's record book, a progress report, and several alternative styles for creating student profiles and records. (MSE)

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A CILT series for language teachers

Pathfinder

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Recording progress

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Pathfinder 1

A CILT series for language teachers

Recording progress

John Thorogood

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Foreword

This short book stems from a personal experience of developing a modern languages teaching framework, incorporating an assessment and recording system. This development has owed much to the ideas incorporated in the OCEA (Oxfordshire Certificate in Educational Achievement) initiative, but has also taken into account the current needs and practices of the school in which it came into being. Thanks are due to the Principal of King Alfred's School, Wantage, Michael Jones, and his Vice-Principals, Eric Woodhouse and Nick Young, for their approval and encouragement early on, to our reprographics staff, Barbara Blackburn and Judy Ellis for their care in producing so much of the documentation, and above all to my colleagues in the modern languages department whose willingness to try out the scheme has made it possible to progress beyond the embryonic stages. The book's completion coincides neatly with the publication of the Interim Report of the National Curriculum Working Party on Modern Languages. Although the model for the recording system discussed predates our latest information, the underlying principles have not changed and the need of every Head of Modern Languages to get to grips with the design of a National Curriculum based scheme of work and continuous assessment and recording system has never been greater.

The contents of this book will not guarantee instant success in setting up a new system of recording - only with regular review and modification will the system emerge which best suits your department in the context of your school, but I hope that the model described here will save you re-inventing wheels.

Introduction

Shortcomings in traditional practice in recording pupils' progress in modern languages.

THE CONVENTIONAL TEACHING PROGRAMME

In the main the languages teaching programme for a school has depended heavily on following the textbooks chosen by the department. The departmental scheme of work may have stated that, for instance, *'Higher ability sets will be expected to have reached the end of Unit 12 of Stage 3 of* Vive la France *by the end of the third year.'* Statements of what exactly this implies in terms of language skills acquired are notably absent and it is assumed that the teachers will infer it from their detailed knowledge of the textbook. This is well and good up to a point, but it does not provide accessible information for such interested parties as pupils and their parents or for other schools seeking transfer information. More to the point for our purposes, it not only fails to provide a prospective description of the programme, it equally fails to provide a retrospective picture of what has been

learned at the end of a given period of time. This is enlarged upon in the section on school reports, and under ISSUE 1 we shall see how this shortcoming can be dealt with.

THE MARKBOOK

The traditional markbook is characterised by narrow columns, conscientiously filled with figures. The columns may be headed with necessarily brief notes on the work to which the figures refer. Once every so often, this dense numerical table is used to make a comment (about which more in the next section) about the progress of some or all of the pupils whose marks are recorded in the book. Now this may be a very precise and sensitive system of recording, used with care, but I believe that many of us would share the fear that it can become a smokescreen of mystification behind which teachers can hide their ignorance of what a pupil can really do.

The problem starts with those figures. What do they mean? Generally, they are a mark out of a theoretical maximum, perhaps /10 (English style) perhaps /20 (French style) - perhaps a random figure indicating the number of vocabulary items in the test whose result was recorded. For most teachers, one imagines, the choice of a maximum is arbitrary. What is more serious, however, is that the award of a mark out of this maximum can be equally arbitrary. Precise mark scales corresponding to performance characteristics have until relatively recently been thought within the province of examining boards only and even here have been rather haphazardly designed. So in many departments, 7/10 may have as many different meanings as there are staff awarding it. Teacher W boasts that he 'never gives 10/10' (therefore 7/10 = 7/9); Teacher X gives credit for well-presented work (therefore 7/10 = 5/10 to the neat but middling pupil); Teacher Y marks 'boldly', generating a full range of 0-10, while Teacher Z, not wishing to discourage the less able, 'bunches' the marks between 5 and 10.

Even if this system were better standardised, it would still have two important weaknesses. Firstly, it is a negative system, based on recording the failure of the learner to achieve perfection. It is of little reassurance to the learner that he 'at least scored 2/10', when he knows full well that this was an abysmal performance in the task set. Secondly, it is a system which does not necessarily record or acknowledge the difference in difficulty between various pieces of work marked. One could argue that there was a world of difference between recalling ten vocabulary items memorised the night before and writing a grammatically correct paragraph about last Saturday's football match, and yet the same recording tools are frequently used for tasks of this disparity. Under 'ISSUE 2' we try to resolve these anomalies.

THE SCHOOL REPORT

The end of term or end of year report is a much satirised document. *'Fair progress, could do better'* is alive and well and appearing in a report somewhere near you!

The traditional report fails the consumer in a number of important ways.

It does not adequately explain to the reader what series of activities is being reported on. This omission tends to reinforce public ignorance of a subject area which is already misunderstood or misrepresented.

Because of the shortcomings of the markbook there is a temptation to use the laconic, facetious or downright vague remark to sum up a pupil's work. Suddenly, when the pressure is on, the row of 6s, 7s and 8s beside a pupil's name lose what little eloquence they had and the platitude reigns supreme.

It sometimes constricts the teacher who has taken the trouble to prepare a full and relevant report.

It never provides support, in the form of checklists, grids, etc, for comment on those areas of concern specific to the language teacher.

It does not invite comment from that most important participant in the learning process, the pupil. (Though it does, as a rule, grant the parent space to write a signature and perhaps a line or two of comment.)

The influence on recording of recent trends in syllabus design

TOPIC-BASED OR MODULAR COURSES

Thanks in no small measure to the pioneering work of the GOML movement a decade ago and later to the syllabus frameworks provided by the GCSE groups, the trend towards topic-related schemes of work is now well-established. Whereas the concern of the Head of Department in the 70s in checking out the scheme of work was to ensure that the imperfect tense had not slipped through the net, the emphasis is now on ensuring that the candidate will at the end of the course be equipped to plan, carry out and report on a holiday in the FL country, to cite one possible topic. It is easier to define for pupil and parent consumption what will appear in a topic based module than in a language based one, and therefore easier to describe afterwards what the learner has achieved.

The influence on recording recent trends in assessment

COMMUNICATIVE TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

There will continue to be learning activities which are not in themselves 'communicative', that is, do not attempt to replicate authentic language use, but belong to the practice stage of language acquisition.

However, it is the aim of today's language teacher to bring pupils to the point where they adopt appropriate linguistic behaviour in a variety of specified situations. It follows that the most important recording will be of attainments in communicative tasks, where the learner has imparted, received or exchanged specified ideas and made appropriate decisions, rather than in linguistic exercises where the learner has merely demonstrated knowledge of vocabulary or usage.

TASK-RELATED ASSESSMENT

To evaluate communicative performance, we have seen above that it is approved practice to set 'tasks', rather than exercises. It is in the nature of tasks that we tend in reality either to accomplish or to fail to accomplish them. Thus, the outcome of a task completion might be expressed as simply as *'Caught the right train'*, *'Was able to provide a picnic for the family,'* or *'Made a reasonable choice, given the information.'* It is now increasingly accepted that in recording communicative competence we are satisfied with a simple 'succeeded' / 'partially succeeded'/ 'failed' note, and that we do not need to mark this kind of success on a 0 - 10 scale.

GRADED OBJECTIVES - LEVELS

In basing the recording of progress on levels, rather than on conventional 'marks out of ' the Graded Objectives movement pointed the way to differentiating between varying degrees of communicative competence. Rather than think of pupils doing well or badly at a broadly targeted task or exercise, we began to conceive of a hierarchy of levels of tasks. By this means we were able to say (positively) *'In this unit of work, Jane has reached Level 2 in her speaking tasks'*, rather than (negatively) *'Jane has scored 4/10 in her oral test'*. Applied to an agreed set of criteria which is available to both teacher and taught, the levels system of recording yields a very exact picture of performance.

GRADED OBJECTIVES - CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Another feature of modern language assessment which we owe to GOML is that of continuous assessment, permitting short-term goals to be set. This has found favour in subjects other than languages up to GCSE level, and recently, even in

languages. The SEG Modular Syllabus and the LEAG GAMLL scheme have received full approval from SEAC as GCSE schemes. The MEG graded assessment scheme is not far from completion as a continuously assessed GCSE equivalent. The OCEA framework, already referred to, is based on a programme of continuous assessment in schools. Thus a comprehensive seal of approval has been set on continuous assessment, whether as an internal arrangement in individual schools or as a route to a public qualification.

Continuous assessment, replacing as it does the conventional summative examination, elevates day-to-day recording of achievement to a higher plane and further emphasises the need for a system which permits easy recording according to well-defined and valid criteria.

The role of the consumer in the recording of progress in modern languages

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ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE USER

We teach in a climate in which the pupil and the parent alike want to know what we are doing and why. This is not peculiar to modern languages, but we do teach a subject in which British learners have been notoriously unsuccessful and in which aims and methodology have been widely misunderstood. We are about to teach to all 14-16 year olds a subject which less than half of their predecessors continued with after age 14 and less than a third of their parents ever studied at all. What we reveal to these consumers through the records we keep has a major role to play in building the future image of language learning.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE USER

Pupil participation in the recording of progress is seen as having an important effect on motivation. A system which invites comment and other forms of active involvement in producing the record is therefore desirable.

FULFILLING STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS

The National Curriculum requires that *'Assessment should be by a combination of national external tests (SATs) and assessment by teachers....Teachers' own assessments, and recording of progress and achievement compared with the attainment targets, will be needed from soon after the attainment targets are introduced...'* These statements from the DES book *From Policy to Practice*, together with unequivocal references to 'profile components' and Records of Achievement, leave us in no doubt that the Law in education reflects the concerns so far introduced.

Implications of the current climate for recording of pupils' progress

TO SUMMARISE:

- ★ There is value in providing a document which gives advance notice of what will be assessed / recorded, both for pupil preparation and teacher planning.
- ★ It is important that both teachers and learners are aware of the criteria by which assessment will take place.
- ★ The learner needs to have a record of attainment that is clear and unequivocal.
- ★ It is desirable that the learner should play some part in the recording process.
- ★ The teacher needs to maintain a group record of attainment which is at least as detailed as the individual record.
- ★ The process of recording should impose the minimum of additional pressure on the teacher who has to operate it, and should be workable within the school system of recording.

ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING A SYSTEM OF RECORDING

- ★ The languages teaching programmes will be modular /thematic in design.
- ★ Assessment will be continuous.
- ★ Attainment will be recorded by discrete skills on the whole, though mixed skill assessment tasks may be set.
- ★ Attainment will be recorded by levels, each of which is defined by a concise set of criteria for each skill.

ISSUE 1 The integration of planning and recording

It goes without saying that it makes sense to assess (and therefore record) competence in what we set out to teach in the first place. In traditional schemes of work which were linguistically defined, the eventual assessment task had a way of being so open-ended in content that it was very hard to predict, either as a teacher preparing pupils for a public exam or as pupils trying to revise for any exam. As suggested above, it is now easier to specify in advance what the content of the course and the target assessment tasks will consist of. This being the case, it is not an impossible task to provide a concise description for every unit of study followed in a learning programme.

Thus, in our department, we have a 'module descriptor' (this jargon phrase, which I borrowed, *faute de mieux*, from another scheme, does not have to be adopted, let alone be inflicted on pupils!) - for each term's work in years 1 - 3. For speed of reference, I have classified each using a Dewey-style system, 1.1 being the first module taught in the first year and 3.2 being the second taught in the third year. An example of the sort of document I have begun to describe is shown on p 8 (Fig. 1).

The descriptor shows us which language it refers to, has a title which conveys the broad content of the module we mean to teach and a reference number as explained above.

Each of the target tasks for this module is discrete skill-related, but there is no reason why there should not be provision for mixed-skill recording if a department has evolved a way of handling the elements of such a task. Each task accomplishment is recorded next to an 'I can' statement, in the column under the appropriate level.

The pre-defined tasks are all communicative and it is these communicative attainments which are given pride of place in the recording of success, although as we shall soon see, we can recognise and record other components of attainment within the framework.

This document doubles as a course planning document which can be given in advance to pupils, and a pupil profile, which it becomes when all attainments have been recorded.

As a planning document it is of value to both pupils and teachers. Those pupils who are sufficiently autonomous in their learning habits can take extra responsibility for their learning when they have a preview of what will be expected, and may wish to work on independently ahead of average ability pupils. Even the less gifted learners have a better chance to remind themselves of what is going on if they are in possession of such a guide.

Especially at the earlier stages of learning, the reverse side of the profile can carry a *resumé* (see Fig 2) of the essential structures and vocabulary required during the module, and our experience shows that some students will constantly refer to this information, until they gain sufficient confidence to go it alone. The profile is thus capable of acting as a support resource.

KING ALFRED'S SCHOOL WANTAGE, MODERN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT
1ST YEAR FRENCH COURSE. MODULE F1.3
IN TOWN: DIRECTIONS AND EATING OUT

Description of achievement	Level reached 1	2	3	4	TEACHER'S COMMENTS AND ADVICE
I can read and understand most signs with names of important places in town					
I can understand a letter in French explaining how to get somewhere in town...					
...and read a café menu					
I can follow spoken directions in town.					
I can understand a waiter explaining what is available in a café.					
I can ask my way in a French town...					
...and tell a French speaker the way in my own town.					
I can order refreshments in a French café.					
I can include in a letter instructions on how to go somewhere in town.					

GRAMMAR CHECKLIST
Use of:je prends,tu prends, il/elle prend, nous prenons,vous prenez, ils/elles prennent
Use of:je vais, tu vas, il/elle va, nous allons, vous allez, ils /elles vont

STUDY SKILLS

How I conduct myself in class	How I cope with homework
How I present my written work	

PUPIL'S COMMENTS
What you found most interesting/enjoyable. What you found difficult. Any remarks on things you did which have some connection with French or France. (e.g. visits/films etc.)

Teacher's signature.....Pupil's signature.....

On the back of this module descriptor, you will find most of the words and phrases needed to perform the tasks listed above.

Fig. 1

2nd Year French Module 1 School and Social Life

Structures and vocabulary.

Qu'est-ce que tu aimes comme matières?	J'aime..... (+ matière(s)
Quelle est ta matière préférée?	C'est le/la
	Ce sont les.....
	Je préfère.....
Pourquoi.....?	Parce que c'est... (adjectif)
Comment trouves-tu le...?	...c'est très...
Que penses-tu du .....?	...ce n'est pas...
	...c'est trop...
Comparisons	C'est plus...../moins...../
	aussi..... que.....
A quelle heure est-ce que tu finis	Je finis (etc)
vous finissez	à ....heures
qu'il/elle finit?	
les classes finissent?	
Qu'est-ce que tu apprends....	J'apprends.....
(pres. tense (ap)prendre	

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

Où est-ce qu'on va (+ other parts of aller)	Allons au.....
Qu'est-ce qu'on fait (+ other parts of faire)	(endroits en ville)
...ce soir/cet après-midi/demain/lundi etc?	On va au.....?
Ça commence/finit à quelle heure?	
On y va?	D'accord/je veux bien
	Je n'aime pas tellement...
Est-ce qu'on doit...	
Est-ce qu'il faut...	
Où/A quelle heure est-ce qu'on se retrouve?	A.....heures.
	Devant.....
Que'est-ce que tu vas mettre?	Je vais mettre.... (vêtements)

Fig. 2

Teachers can use the profile as a long-range planner, and the department's scheme of work now consists of an aims and methodology section which is cross-referenced with the complete set of 'module descriptors' as statements of course content.

The document acts as a progress chart in a number of ways.

Pupils can see how they have been getting on in the current module and can look back to compare this progress with previous units. They can show their parents at any time not only how well they are doing, but **what** they are doing. This offers the modern languages department an effective showcase for its scheme of work at a time when there is a greater need than ever for the general public to understand what foreign language learning entails in the 1990s.

In conjunction with a chart explaining the levels of achievement (Fig. 3) the profile document reveals much more precisely the characteristics of the pupil's performance than traditional 'marks out of...' and the hurried, subjective and often spatially limited remarks of the old-style report.

Although it may be the teacher who is the arbiter of what level of skill has been attained, it is the pupil who records the level on the profile. There is further scope for self-evaluation under the heading 'study skills', where the pupil has a chance to reflect on and record how attitudes and self-organisation may have contributed to progress or lack of it. It must be said that in our experience, pupils are very honest and realistic in their subjective recording and err on the side of criticism rather than complacency, so may need to be encouraged to look for positive points! A further opportunity for responding to the course is offered in inviting students to register their enthusiasms, anxieties, and extra-curricular language-related activities on the profile (Fig. 4).

The teacher needs to keep a check on the introduction of new linguistic material into the programme and the profile document can also provide a checklist and recording grid for the mastery of such items as irregular verbs and structural features (e.g. *venir de* + INF) where it is worth emphasising these.

The whole profile can be signed by the teacher and countersigned by the pupil. It may, in certain whole-school recording systems be appropriate to use the profile, or a copy of it, as a report, without having to issue any separate statement. It is more common, however, for the school system to operate less frequently than the module system, in which case some form of summary document needs to be devised for external consumption. (We deal with this in ISSUE 3) This does not, however, mean that we cannot encourage pupils and parents to regard the module profiles as valid records of attainment. It is important to note that, if we do need to produce an additional review sheet, we must avoid creating an unreasonable extra workload. For example, we might minimise duplication by letting the level scores on the profiles, in conjunction with the level criteria chart, speak for themselves and only write teachers' comments on the summary review sheet.

I have found a word-processor an invaluable aid to creating a whole series of documents of similar layout but different content. By creating a new filename for the next unit to be described and then copying the contents of the present file to the new filename and editing the wording, I was able to perpetuate a fairly complex layout without having to reset tabulations or refer constantly to earlier models to maintain a consistent style of presentation. The pictorial element was added to each descriptor after printing, but the fortunate owners of DTP software may be able to do the whole process electronically.

Students' guide to the assessment of performance

Your performance in the language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing will be assessed according to a system of Levels. This idea is already widespread in Oxfordshire and other counties and is a preparation for the National Curriculum, which is soon to apply to Modern Languages. At the moment, we are operating a simplified system of four levels, although the National Curriculum is based on ten levels.

Here is an explanation of what each of the four levels means for each skill.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
LISTENING	You can pick out simple details based on individual words from short passages spoken at a slow to moderate speed. 1 detail per passage	You can distinguish short sentences and phrases from a longer passage than in Level 1 picking out 2 or 3 details from the same passage	You can explain the general meaning of a longer passage (50-75 words), spoken faster and using a wider variety of language. Your explanation will be partly guided.	You can give a detailed summary, without guidance, of a passage of more than 75 words, including some unfamiliar ones. You may be expected to express an opinion or draw conclusions from the text.
	Recently learned vocabulary. Supported answer - e.g. fill in grid			
READING	You can pick out simple details based on single words from a text printed or clearly handwritten. 1 detail per passage.	You can understand short sentences and phrases as in L1 picking out 2/3 details per passage.	You can explain the general meaning of a longer passage (50-75 words) possibly in more difficult handwriting. Some guidance with organising answer.	You can give a detailed summary, without guidance, of a passage of more than 75 words, including some unfamiliar ones. You may be expected to express an opinion or draw conclusions from the text.
	Recently learned vocabulary. Supported answer - e.g. fill in grid			
WRITING	You can write words and recent[illegible] learnt phrases as lists or to describe pictures.	You can build simple sentences to state facts or ask questions and use set phrases to write a simple message.	You can write a letter of at least 50 words in which you successfully communicate a series of ideas to a native reader, even though not entirely accurately.	You can write a letter of at least 100 words accurately enough for a native reader to understand with little or no effort. Vocabulary should be wider than for L3 and you should be able to give opinions or negotiate.
SPEAKING	You can use set phrases to exchange simple facts and ask for things. Your questions and answers may be incomplete, but understood. You will not yet cope with unexpected answers.	You can extend a simple conversation by offering extra facts and returning questions. Your sentences will be short, but mainly correct. You can cope with choices offered.	You can sustain a social conversation or conclude a transaction involving simple negotiation. Some effort may be required of the listener, but you will get your message across.	You can perform as in L3 but with a higher level of accuracy so that little or no effort is required of the listener. You will be able to express opinions and argue your case.
	Recently learnt language in familiar situations		Using a wide range of vocabulary in less predictable situations	

Fig. 3

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CHART OF CRITERIA FOR PERFORMANCE TASKS IN MODERN LANGUAGES. OCEA

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
LISTENING	OUTCOME Has understanding of individual words	OUTCOME Has understanding of short items/key words of text	OUTCOME Can explain what text is about	OUTCOME Can give a detailed summary in English
	TEXT Short, self-contained, delivered at a comprehensible speed	TEXT Possibly longer and more difficult	TEXT Sustained (e.g. 50-75 w) delivered at a faster speed than L1/2. Possible background noise and wider range of known vocabulary/structures	TEXT As L3 but 75w + + possible regional accent + more abstract content + inclusion of unfamiliar vocabulary/structure
	Using recently acquired vocabulary and structures			
	TASK Questions relating to individual words and with element of guidance. Could include grid filling. 1 detail per utterance	TASK As for 1, but... requires understanding of relationship between words Up to 2/3 details extracted per utterance	TASK As in 1 and 2, + Questions require an element of summary - some guidance given on organisation of material.	TASK Questions require unguided organisation of ideas in the text and ability to draw conclusions/express opinions/infer meanings of new words
READING	OUTCOME Has understanding of individual words	OUTCOME Has understanding of short items/key words of text	OUTCOME Can explain what text is about	OUTCOME Can give a detailed summary in English
	TEXT Short, self-contained, printed text or very clear authentic h/writing	TEXT Possibly longer or more difficult	TEXT Sustained (e.g. 50-75 w) inc. less clear authentic h/writing + wider range of known structures	TEXT As L3 but 75w + + more abstract content + inclusion of unknown vocabulary/structure
	TASK As for Listening above	TASK As for Listening above	TASK As for Listening above	TASK As for Listening above
WRITING	OUTCOME Can produce single recognisable words and phrases.	OUTCOME Can produce short notes and simple sentences in comprehensible French	OUTCOME Can produce more continuous text showing such grammatical competence as is necessary for communication.	OUTCOME As for L3, but grammatical competence such that little or no effort is required of the reader. Evidence of a wider range of vocabulary and idiom than at L3. Learner should be able to express opinions/attitudes and negotiate.
	TASK Framework provided with prompts or models in order to elicit single words or short phrases.	TASK Same as L1, but with clear guidelines or examples, but requiring short simple sentences.	TASK Write a letter of at least 50 words based on written or visual stimuli which indicate precise ideas to be conveyed.	TASK Write a letter or account of at least 100 words, based on a general stimulus which leaves scope for interpretation.
SPEAKING	OUTCOME Can communicate a small part of a message and/or obtain basic information.	OUTCOME Can communicate a large part of a message and/or obtain information. Some effort required by listener.	OUTCOME Can communicate and/or obtain Some effort required by the listener.	OUTCOME Can speak at length accurately No effort required by listener
	TASK Conversation: Series of mechanical utterances question/answer - simple short answers. Transaction: short simple predictable utterances.	TASK As L1, but including questions of a more open-ended nature e.g. - 'Tell me about...'	TASK Conversations/dialogues/interviews will include a wider range of topics - a greater variety of language. Possibility to improvise and expand. Fluency, but not necessarily accomplished accent expected Transactional: Tasks expect learner to take initiative/deal with unexpected	TASK Conversations/dialogues/interviews covering a wide range of topics - lack of prompting - but requiring appropriate use of tenses, vocabulary, structures and a range of idioms.

Fig. 4

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ISSUE 2 Recording communicative competence

We have noted above (introduction) that priority in our recording will be given to communicative tasks which the pupil has accomplished. Provided that we make clear what our criteria for satisfactory performance at each level are (e.g. explanatory chart) the recording of a level against each target task should be sufficient for this purpose. We have already outlined this process in ISSUE 1.

If the profile document is to be in the possession of the pupil, it is important that the teacher should have a corresponding record of all the scores entered for all pupils in the group. The group record need in fact be little more than a traditional markbook as issued by the school. If the mark columns are headed with brief descriptions of the target tasks and figures are entered below to indicate levels, the teacher record function is adequately discharged, and some teachers may feel more comfortable with their old markbooks than with new documents.

I have attempted a refinement of the above, for the benefit of those of my colleagues who wanted a more custom-built approach to recording. A sample page is illustrated on p 14 (Fig. 5). I have deliberately emphasised the status of communicative task scores by placing these on the left-hand page of the spread, while allowing space on the right for test and pre-communicative exercise scores (which may incidentally be traditional numerical '-/10' scores) and for any diagnostic record, e.g. A-E grading, a teacher might wish to keep of linguistic skills such as spelling and intonation, or study skills such as organisation of material, perseverence or autonomy. The layout of the heading section makes it easier to write in task descriptions than would be the case in an ordinary markbook.

It is intended that the tasks listed in the group record for each module of work should be exactly those prescribed on the 'module descriptor' or, eventually, the 'pupil profile' document. In this way, even if a profile is mislaid, the essential attainment information it contained will be safe. It can be transferred both to a new copy of the profile sheet and to a summary review sheet if so desired.

It is helpful if there is a separate page for each unit of work, so I have allowed a two page spread for each term for each group taught and included enough pages in the record book for up to eight groups. These are practicalities which any Head of Department will need to consider. The books used in my department were printed and assembled by our reprographics team and look very smart (Fig. 6). Good presentation of related materials can boost the morale of a team implementing new ideas.

Fig. 5

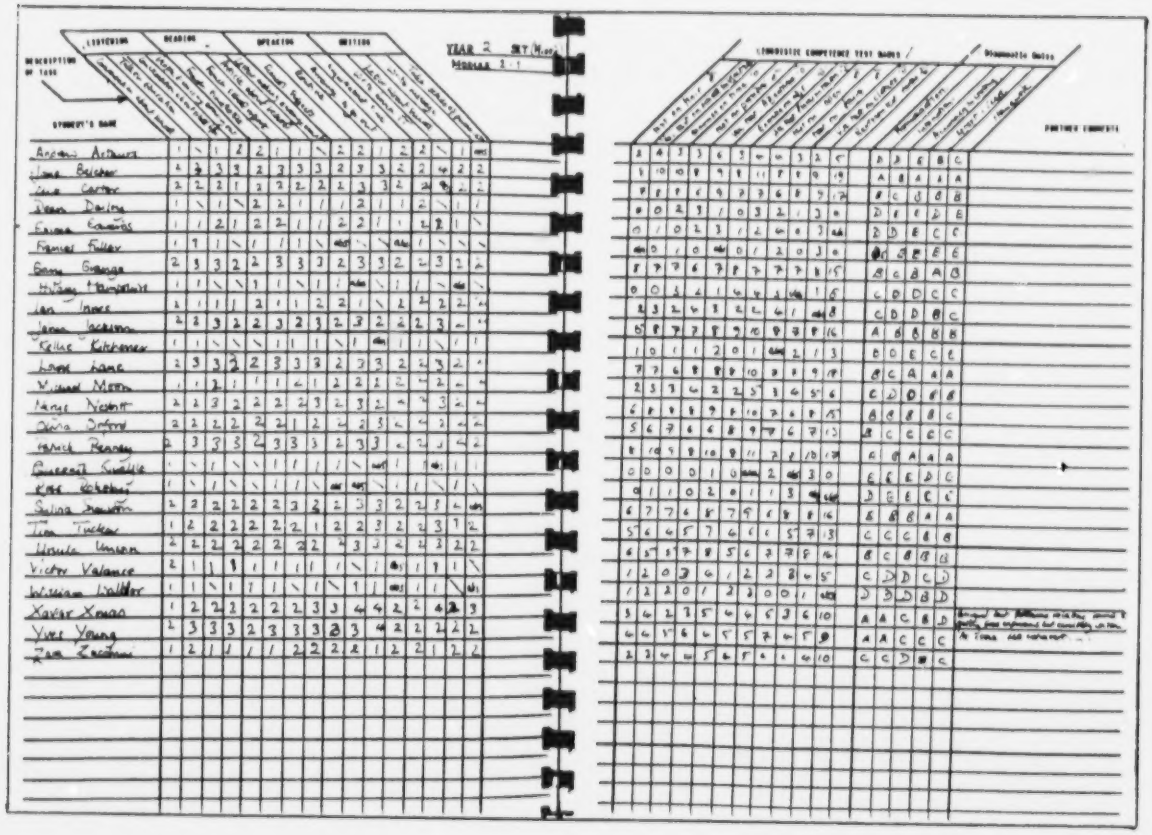

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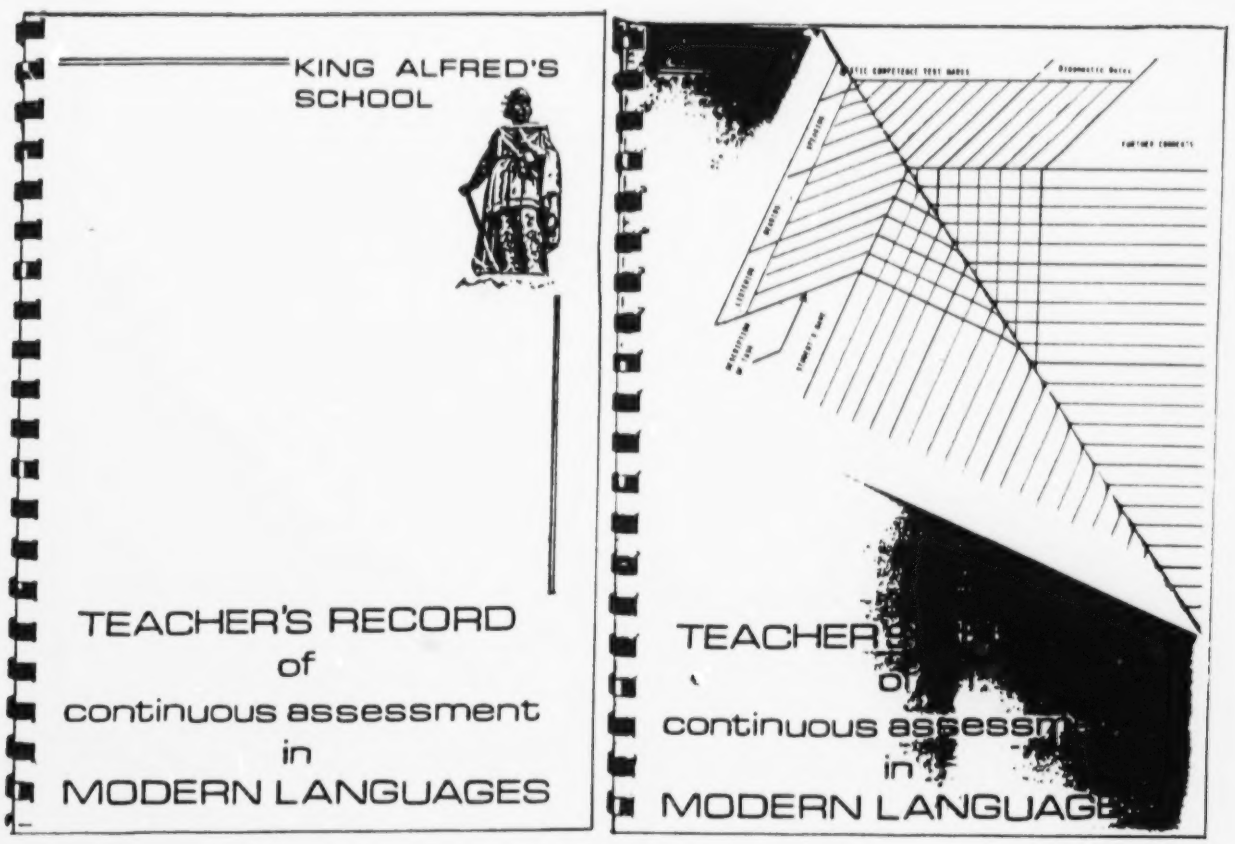
Fig. 6



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ISSUE 3 Reporting pupils' progress

We have seen that the pupil profile already performs a useful informative function for any who care to read it, and in particular for the pupil and the interested parent. If however, as is often the case, the school's policy is to issue all-subject reports at times of the academic year which do not correspond to the ends of individual subject units, then the pressure is on the department to produce a document or write a report entry which refers to a longer period than the profile suggested above.

To be frank, if the school's senior management are unshakeably committed to the continuance of report forms with spaces for subjects, or to a cheque-book style of report, it is not going to be easy to integrate into our recording/reporting system a document that reflects the accuracy and completeness of the pupil profiles. However if, as was luckily the case for my school, the policy is to compile assessment books of full size sheets, then a useful review sheet can be designed which will permit a comprehensive summary of the work covered in several modules.

What, then, may we expect to learn from such a review sheet? The first piece of information we might find is a list of the module titles covered in the course since the last major review sheet was circulated. This will set the scene for the detail which follows.

There are various approaches one can adopt to incorporating previous attainment records into an end of year statement.

One way is to design the score grids of the review sheet so that they can have copied on to them all the levels in all skills assessed in a series of modules. This has the virtue of showing fluctuations of progress over the period reported on. It does, however, add a little to the work load which must be borne at an inevitably busy time of year. Another possibility is to record a typical level of performance for each skill, based on a modal (most common) or arithmetic mean (average) score. This shortens the process of entry, but does not reveal whether the pupil's attainment is improving, worsening or staying the same.

In the end, some decision must be made, and an appropriate layout adopted. A possible format is shown in Fig. 7.

KING ALFRED'S SCHOOL — MODERN LANGUAGES REVIEW SHEET

Date of review	Student's name	Teacher	Tutor
12/6/90	Gary Grange	JRT	SD Form 2 SD

Language: French.

Summary of achievement in modules completed

Module No.	Module Title			
2.1	News / Travel / Journey in a French House			
Skill	Listen	Read	Speak	Write
Level	3	3	3	3
Module No. 2.2	Module Title: Visiting a French friend's house			
Skill	Listen	Read	Speak	Write
Level	3	3	3	2
Module No. 2.3	Module Title: Spending money - Parents & Friends			
Skill	Listen	Read	Speak	Write
Level	2	3	3	3

Diagnostic grading as appropriate.

Pronunciation	B
Accent/intonation	C
Spelling	B
Grammatical Concepts	B
Self-reliance in tasks	A

Student's self-assessment and reactions to the course

I have enjoyed the work this year, especially the role-play in pairs and groups. I sometimes worry about word tests, because I don't always understand why words change the way they do! Module 2.3 was really useful when we went to Epping in May. G Grange.

Teacher's assessment

You have maintained a high standard through hard work and enthusiasm in class. In spite of occasional inaccuracies in writing, you communicate well. If your hear listening from this term between you, I am happy you on rebooking practice tape. Jean Teacher

Parents' response to assessment

We are really pleased that Gary has enjoyed his French this year after his anxieties in the 1st year. How can we support him in his work? Marian Grange

Fig. 7

If you have followed the scheme so far, you will have a readily available chart of levels criteria to consult, and you may feel that the recording of a number may suffice. If, however, you want to add a verbal comment about progress in each skill, this need can be catered for in the document. You then have a choice between a succinct objective restatement of the criteria applying to the level achieved, or a more personal comment.

In the former case, it is a distinct advantage to be linked to a computer-based reporting system such as SIMS. Using this technology, you can key in an agreed code (e.g. W 3 = Writing - Level 3) which generates a statement, devised by the department, to describe the characteristics of writing performance at Level 3). For many teachers, such automated reporting alone is anathema, and for them, a review sheet ought to allow some scope for more personal comment, whether related to discrete skills or entered in a general section.

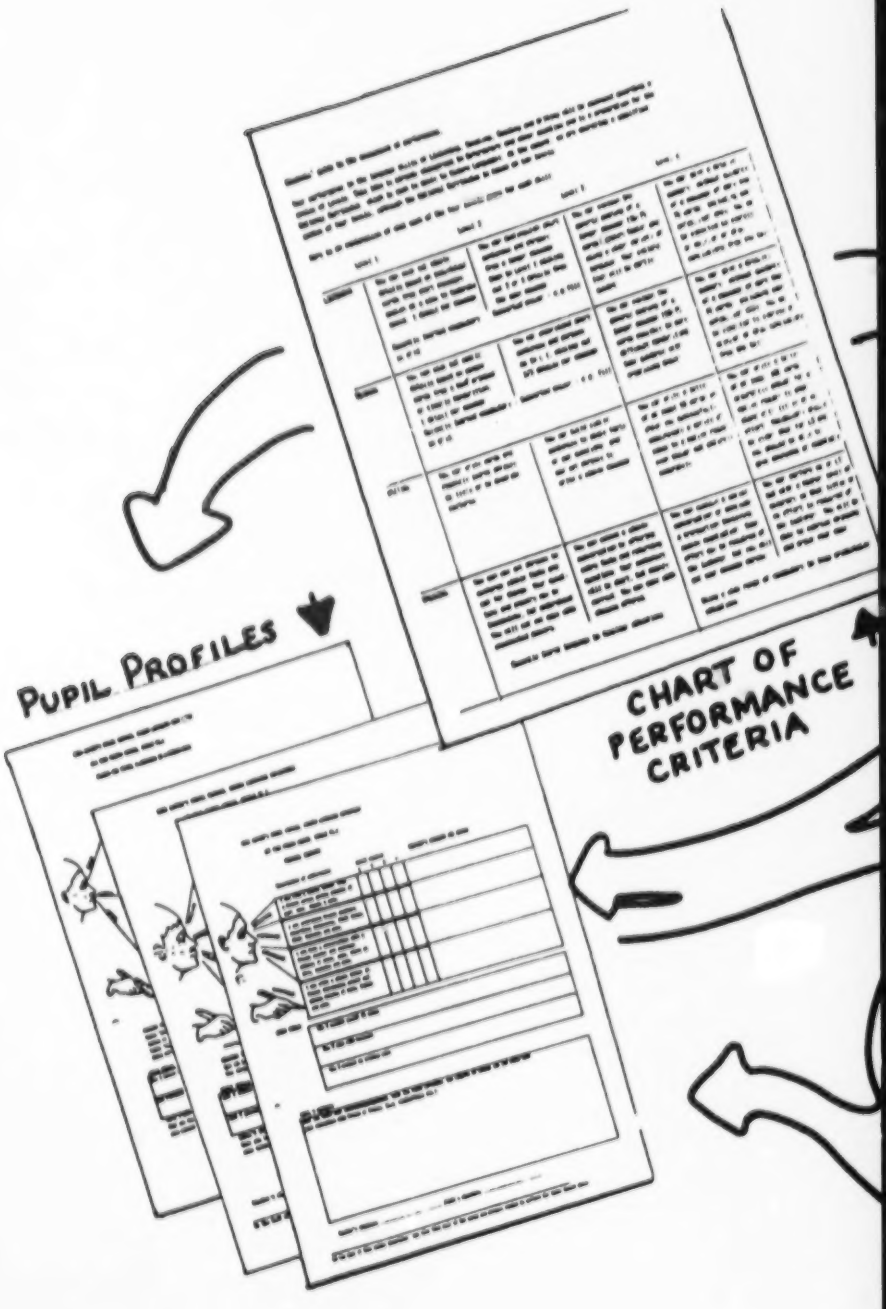

Fig.8

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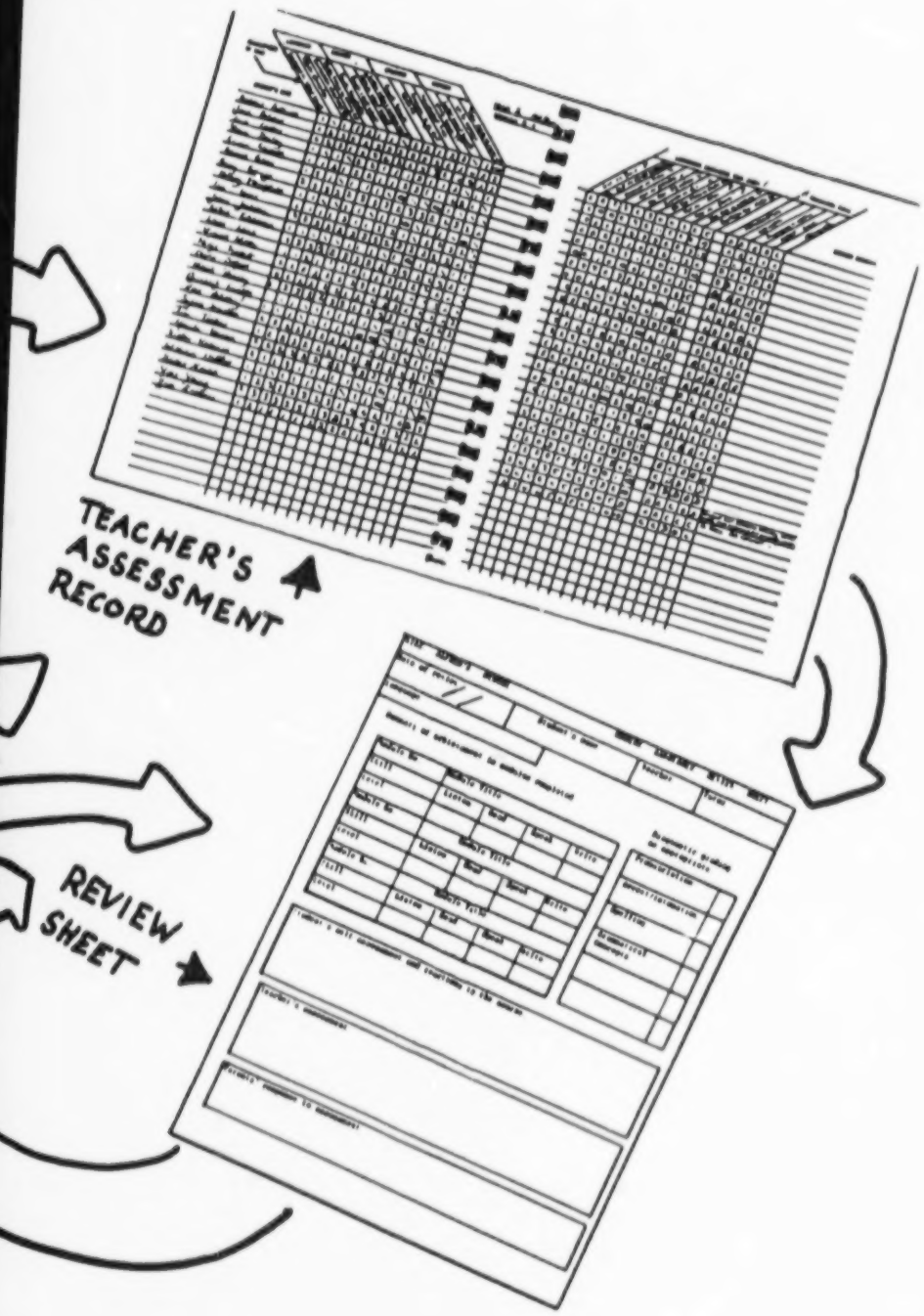

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The review sheet provides an opportunity to go public on some of the diagnostic observations made in the group record. Concise comment on accent, intonation, spelling, or study skills can be included in their own section, or incorporated in a general section if preferred.

The review sheet should certainly give adequate room for the pupil to respond to the course, to self-evaluate and to state areas of concern. Parents too should be invited to contribute to this record as more than mere signatories.

ISSUE 4 Options open to the innovator

What has so far been described is a system which works for one school. Other schools in the same county have been operating along these lines but their schemes differ in a number of details. It is important that the potential innovator should distinguish principles from nuts and bolts and not be intimidated by the latter into thinking that the former is unworkable in his or her department. I include below a number of areas in which choice could be exercised without the underlying principles and benefits of the recording system being compromised.

LEVELS BY TASK DESIGN OR BY OUTCOME?

Although primarily an assessment, rather than a recording issue, it deserves brief mention. The choice here is whether you want the hard work to come at the preparation or the marking stage!

An undifferentiated task offering the possibility of several levels of accomplishment usually takes less time to devise than a battery of differentiated tasks each of which represents a different level in the same skill area. For instance (and it is often in the productive skills that we may go for the multi-level option) we might set a letter-writing task in which the prescribed elements are of a range of difficulty. Certain elements if achieved earn Level 1, some Level 2, and so on. Alternatively, we may have a set of level-related profiles of linguistic performance by which to judge the letter as a whole.

Two problems present themselves here. Firstly, students likely to score at the lowest levels may be put off by the seeming difficulty of an assignment capable of offering a serious challenge to a high-level learner. Secondly, the process of marking a class set of tasks in which several different levels of outcome may be achieved can be a tedious one.

If the department is able (in terms of willing personnel) to devise differentiated tasks for each skill in each module of work, the eventual assessment (and therefore recording) of attainment is likely to be quick and simple. For each completed task one has merely to ask *'Did they or didn't they?'* and record the level of the task.

PARTIAL USE OF THE SYSTEM SUGGESTED?

If you want to embrace at least some of the principles above, but know that, for example, the school system or a significant number of departmental colleagues will be incompatible with, opposed to, or unable to understand, the framework proposed, there are some compromise positions which you can adopt.

★ Go for the profile (module descriptor) style of record, but for the time being continue with a conventional mark system, with a mental note to sow the

seeds of level-based recording later in the year with a view to revising the mark system next September.

★ Use the profile and introduce a levels scheme, but use existing published attainment tests, vetted to exclude non-communicative items and classified by mutual agreement according to the number of levels decided upon by the department. Home-produced, made-to-measure tasks can be devised later and slotted into the scheme as time and inspiration permit.

★ Offer the customised mark-book as an alternative to, or as a model ruling for, a conventional mark book, rather than insist on its adoption outright.

★ If the powers-that-be insist on an established format for reporting to parents, e.g. report book, chequebook slips, omit the department-specific review sheet and use the established system to refer to the profiles covered since the last 'official' report.

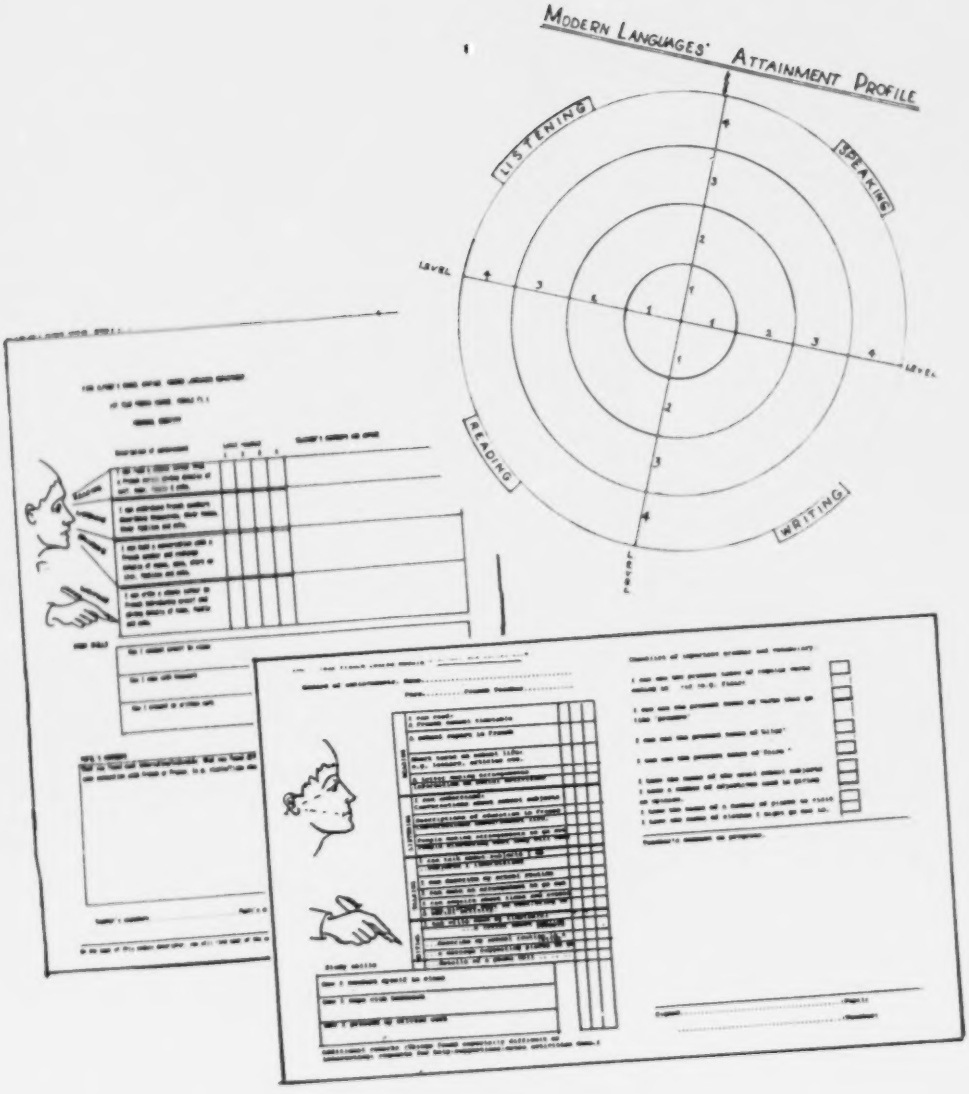
These are, of course, only a sample of the many combinations of compromise you can resort to to get the scheme off the ground without causing too large a blip on enemy radar. The best compromise for you will depend on your sensitivity to the prevailing anxieties of your colleagues and your skill in identifying those features of the new framework which most appeal to their aspirations. (*'Aye, lad, but will it stretch them?' ...'We must have rigour, Mrs. Carruthers'... 'Will Wayne's parents understand it better than the reports we have now?'*...etc.)

ALTERNATIVE STYLES OF PUPIL PROFILE?

If you can think of a layout that will (a) sell the idea and (b) meet your needs, better than anything illustrated so far, then go to it! The layout possibilities are infinite. First you have the choice of 'Portrait' or 'Landscape' use of the sheets of the document (see Fig. 9). The conventional rectilinear grid with numerical entries is one way in which attainment data may be recorded, but...

A grid consisting of concentric circles, crossed by radii which create a segment for each assessable skill has found much favour (Fig. 10). If the data are entered as lines connecting maxima for each skill, or if each segment is shaded or coloured to show attainment, the resulting picture will have more impact, and may indeed be more appealing for the learner to fill in.

For the younger learner, you might use symbols which indicate the skill being assessed and the level recorded. Again, colouring or shading symbols of various sizes according to the level of attainment, could prove a more motivating activity than merely entering figures (Fig. 11).



Figs. 9 & 10

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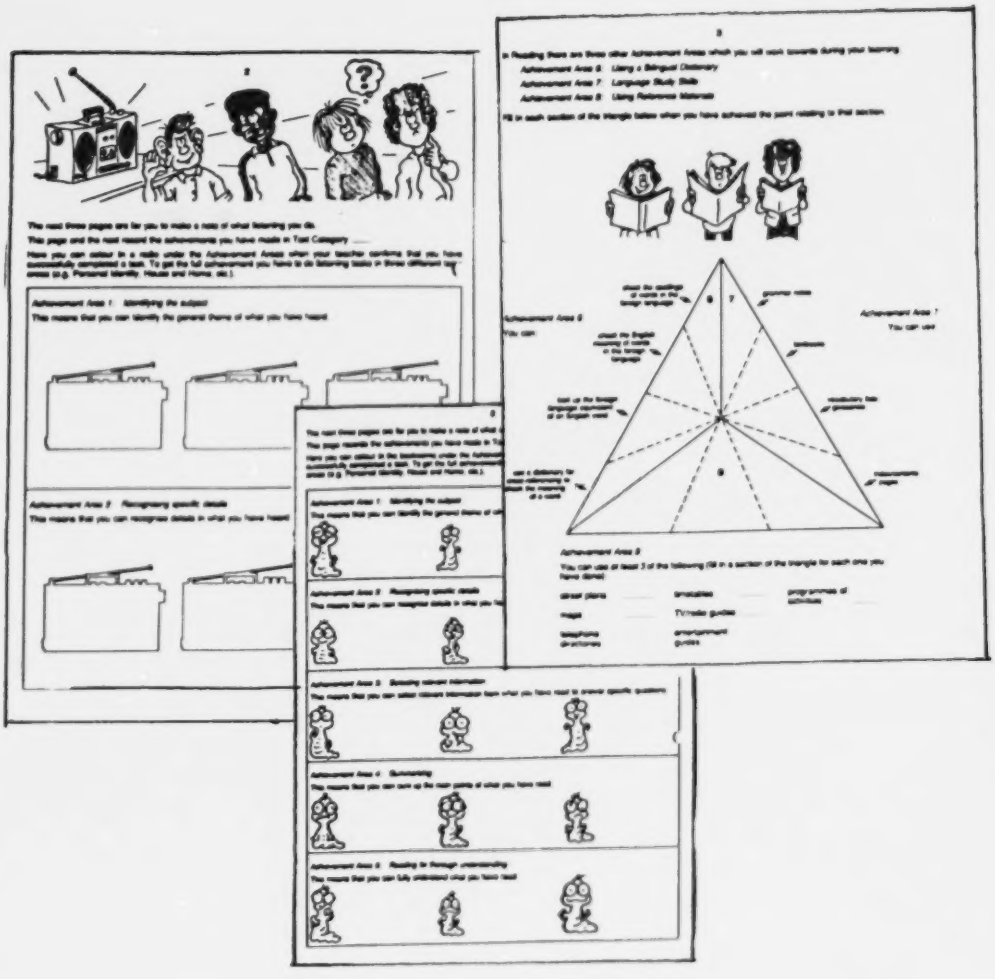

Figs 11

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Further examples of review sheets used in upper schools

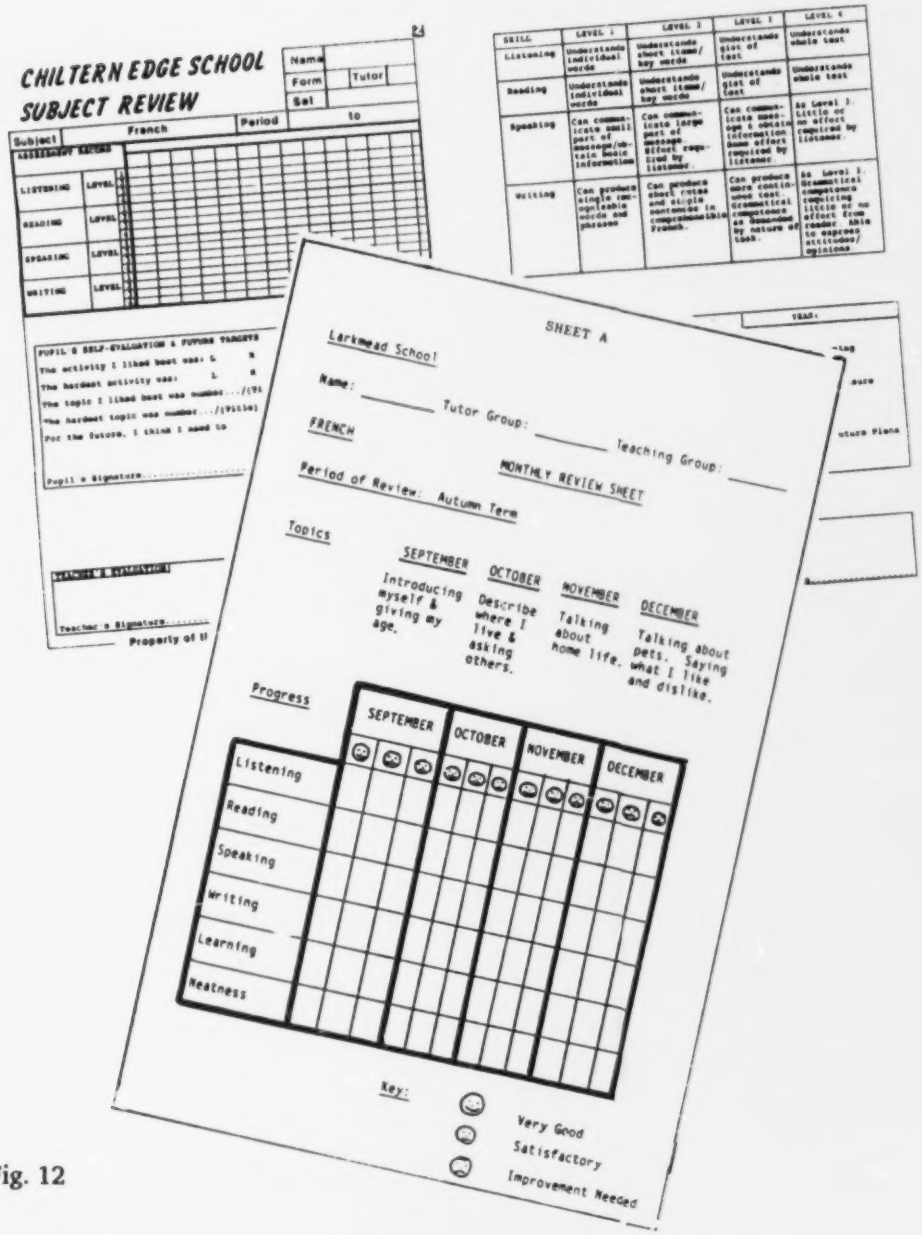

Fig. 12

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Fig. 13

APPENDIX 3

WESLEY GREEN MIDDLE SCHOOL FRENCH LANGUAGE RECORD

PUPIL..... CLASS..... DATE.....

TRICOLORE UNITS COVERED

UNIT 8 / TELLING THE TIME
MEALS IN FRANCE

UNIT 9 SHOPS AND SHOPPING

UNIT 10 PICNICS AND SNACKS

OTHER WORK

.....

.....

.....

Level of achievement code
1 = more work/effort needed 2 = fairly good 3 = very good

LANGUAGE SKILLS			
UNIT	8	9	10
SPEAKING			
WRITING			
LISTENING			
READING			

CLASSWORK	
EFFORT IN CLASS	
PRESENTATION OF WORK	
BEHAVIOUR	
ATTITUDE	

PUPIL'S COMMENT

I enjoyed.....

.....

I will try harder to.....

.....

TEACHER'S COMMENT

.....

.....

PARENT'S COMMENT

.....

.....

signature.....

BAYSWATER MIDDLE SCHOOL

PROGRESS REPORT FRENCH

PUPILS NAME LANGUAGE GROUP MONTH/YEAR

TUTOR GROUP TEACHERS NAME

TOPICS COVERED

ASSESSMENT KEY V.Easy √ √ Easy √ / Quite Diff. X V. Diff. XX

I find it easy/difficult to:	
SPEAKING Answer in front of whole class.	
Speak/role-play in pairs/groups.	
LISTENING Understand conversations on tape.	
Understand passages on tape.	
READING Understand signs and notices.	
Understand sentences.	
Understand passages.	
WRITING Do written exercises.	
Write some sentences of my own.	

TEACHER RESPONSE

PARENTAL RESPONSE

Examples of review sheets used in middle schools

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As already discussed above, the profile form might have more or less space devoted to the student's performance in non-communicative activities, for example, diagnostic comments on spelling or pronunciation, the recording of their grasp of linguistic points and their own perceptions of study skills, such as coping with private study.

How important these peripheral records are will be a matter for individual departmental policy and priorities may differ widely. Whatever the case, the extent to which you include these items is bound to affect the overall appearance of your document.

HOW MANY LEVELS?

The National Curriculum stipulates ten levels of attainment, but at the time of writing has only reported on subject areas begun in year 1 and therefore assessable from Keystage 1 onwards. By the time you read this the Modern Languages Working Party will have made its interim report and you will have a clearer picture of how the ten level framework will be interpreted for languages.

I would venture to suggest that the uncertainty does not matter unduly, because differentiation criteria, once established, can easily be manipulated to accommodate changes in the numerical scale. What has been useful for my own department has been the opportunity to practise seeing the marking-recording process in a new light, so that the eventual arrival of the nationally-imposed framework will require modification, rather than revolution.

So, what could you do first? The simplest differentiation would be between 'Higher' and 'Basic' tasks and performances, as favoured in some GCSE syllabus design. To subdivide further into two higher levels and two basic levels, with simple differentiating criteria for each is not a difficult step to take. We have used a four level scale in years one to three and found it relatively easy to operate with a criteria chart, as described above. A simple scale, well practised, ought to provide a good starting point for a ten level scale as this became the statutory requirement.

In operating a four-point interim scale, the application of the Higher/Basic criteria first and then subdividing to arrive at levels 1,2,3 or 4 is probably an easier way of proceeding than laboriously learning four profiles for each skill. For instance, in speaking, we might decide that handling unpredictability was a Higher performance criterion, and that therefore any student coping with the unrehearsed question in a conversation was operating at level 3 or 4. An important differentiator between 3 and 4 might be whether the student made 'a number of mistakes which did not hinder communication' or very few mistakes'. By cross-referencing criteria in this way, a level of performance can be quickly enough established to make class oral assessment a relatively painless activity. (e.g. a student who copes with an unpredictable dialogue and puts over his/her message without inspiring much confidence in his/her precision is operating at level 3.)

What is important is not to agonise about what the National Curriculum will prescribe in exact detail, but to become proficient in establishing criteria for your own department, so that when an eventual scale is handed down, you will recognise certain points on it as corresponding to your own practice and have real insights into comparing your students' performances with the national levels.

It appears that one of the better things Mao Tse Tung did when he came to power in China was to tell all communes to build their own blast furnaces to smelt local ore. It was not expected that the communes would produce useable pig iron: the Chairman's real intention was that when China was in a position to expand its full-scale iron and steel industry, every Chinese would say *'I know how to do that!'* and become a willing recruit to the developing industry. We can go one better than that, because our home-produced recording schemes actually will perform a useful function, while we await a definitive framework.

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